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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001345

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV  
COMMERCE FOR ITA JEAN KELLY  
TREASURY FOR OASIA JEFF NEIL  
COLOMBO FOR ECON MANLOWE  
USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [ETRD](#) [ECON](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: BURMA'S GRUNTS VS. MI: ROUND ONE?

REF: RANGOON 1337

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: An apparent up-country attack by the Burmese army's regular forces on a once untouchable interagency unit including military intelligence officers has led to speculation that long-simmering hatred between MI and the regular troops has begun to heat up. The incident is quite extraordinary, but we are not quite ready to attach major political significance to what could turn out to be an isolated incident. End summary.

The Shot Heard 'Round Muse

12. (C) We've heard from a number of reliable sources about an unprecedented attack in mid-September by elements of a regional military command on a unit of NaSaKa officers at a checkpoint near the Burma-China border at Muse. The soldiers surrounded the NaSaKa unit, roughed them up, and arrested its leadership. NaSaKa is an interagency group including Customs, Immigration, and Military Intelligence (MI) that operates, often corruptly and with impunity, in the border regions. According to an active China border trader, this particular unit controlled the Pang Hpak Man checkpoint just south of Muse and was notorious for its corruption, smuggling, and ruthless treatment of competing smugglers.

13. (C) Because of MI's control of information and its secret files on all military officials, members of regional commands are traditionally reluctant to take action against their MI colleagues no matter the offense. This status quo has apparently been approved at the highest levels -- where Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt commands MI and SPDC #2 Vice Senior General Maung Aye controls the regional military commands. No one with whom we spoke about this incident could remember another such attack occurring.

14. (C) The trigger for this action is not exactly clear. There are rumors that this NaSaKa unit had knowingly intercepted convoys carrying smuggled goods for very senior VIPs in Rangoon. Other rumors claimed that the unit had brutally killed a young Kachin smuggler who turned out to be a relative of a senior official of one of the Kachin cease-fire groups in Myitkyina. In either event, our sources reported that the local military commander complained to Rangoon about the actions of this NaSaKa unit. The word came down from the highest level, then, that action should be taken.

Comment: Nevermind Why

15. (C) Most of our sources insist that this move has political significance as an attack by Maung Aye and Than Shwe (representing the regional commands) against Khin Nyunt (representing MI and NaSaKa). Indeed such an attack is apparently unprecedented and would certainly require authorization from the very top of the SPDC. However, we haven't seen enough evidence to convince us this is the first blow in a long-predicted open power struggle between the military and MI. It could just be punishment of a previously untouchable group of officials who went one step too far. Further attacks along these lines, or any acts of "revenge" by NaSaKa or MI, could add credence to the theory that turf battles among the "Big Three" are escalating. End comment.  
Martinez